

Philippines

Country Specific Information

May 11, 2010

This replaces the Country Specific Information for the Philippines dated November 6, 2009 to update the sections on Crime and Traffic Safety and Road Conditions.

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION: The Philippines is an emerging economy with a democratic system of government. Located in Southeast Asia, the archipelago consists of more than 7,000 islands, of which over 800 are inhabited. The major island groupings are Luzon in the north, the Visayas in the center and Mindanao in the south. Tourist facilities are available within population centers and the main tourist areas. English is widely spoken in the Philippines, and most signs are in English. Read the Department of State [Background Notes on the Philippines](#) for additional information.

REGISTRATION / EMBASSY LOCATION: U.S. citizens living or traveling in the Philippines are encouraged to register with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate at the [Department of State's travel registration page](#) in order to obtain updated information on travel and security within the Philippines. U.S. citizens without Internet access may register directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Registration is important; it allows the State Department to assist U.S. citizens in an emergency. Local embassy information is available below and at the [Department of State's list of embassies and consulates](#).

[The U.S. Embassy](#)

1201 Roxas Boulevard
Manila, Philippines
Telephone (63) (2) 301-2000
Facsimile: (63) (2) 301-2017

There is one consular agency in Cebu City, which provides limited services to U.S. citizens but is not authorized to issue passports. Anyone requesting service at the consular agency should call ahead to verify that the service requested will be available on the day you expect to visit the agency.

U.S. Consular Agency
Ground Level, Waterfront Hotel
Salinas Drive
Lahug, Cebu City
Philippines 6000
Telephone: (63)(32) 231-1261
Facsimile: (63)(32) 231-0174

ENTRY / EXIT REQUIREMENTS: U.S. citizens may enter the Philippines without a visa for tourism purposes upon presentation of their U.S. passport, valid for at least six months after the date of entry into the Philippines, and a return ticket to the United States or an onward ticket to another country. Upon arrival, immigration authorities will annotate the traveler's passport with an entry visa valid for 21 days. If the traveler plans to stay longer than 21 days, he/she must apply for an extension at the Philippine Bureau of Immigration and Deportation's main office at Magallanes Drive, Intramuros, Manila, Philippines, or at any of its provincial offices. If you are coming to the Philippines for other purposes, please check the [Embassy of the Philippines website](#) for visa requirements and/or the [Philippine Bureau of Immigration](#). You may be denied entry or be given a fine if your purpose for entry is other than tourism and you do not possess the correct visa.

Persons who overstay their visas are subject to fines and detention by Philippine immigration authorities. U.S. citizens are urged to remain aware of their visa status while in the Philippines and to strictly follow immigration laws and regulations. Travelers departing the country from international airports must pay a Passenger Service Charge in Philippine Pesos. Visit the [Embassy of the Philippines](#) web site for the most current visa information.

Special requirements exist for the entry of unaccompanied minors. In an effort to prevent international child abduction, the Philippine Government requires that a waiver of exclusion be obtained from a Philippine Embassy or Consulate or from the Bureau of Immigration and Detention in Manila prior to a child's entry into the Philippines for a child under 15 years of age who plans to enter the Philippines unaccompanied by either a parent or legal guardian.

HIV/AIDS restrictions: The U.S. Department of State is unaware of any HIV/AIDS entry restrictions for visitors. U.S. citizens applying for residency status in the Philippines can be excluded based on this illness. Please verify this information with the Embassy of the Philippines at 1600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036, telephone 202-467-9300 before you travel.

Information about [dual nationality](#) or the prevention of [international child abduction](#) can be found on our website. For further information about customs regulations, please read our [Customs Information](#) page.

SAFETY AND SECURITY: U.S. citizens contemplating travel to the Philippines should carefully consider the risks to their safety and security while there, including those risks due to terrorism. While travelers may encounter such threats anywhere in the Philippines, the southern island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago are of particular concern. Travelers should exercise extreme caution in both central and western Mindanao as well as in the Sulu Archipelago. For further information regarding the continuing threats due to terrorist and insurgent activities in the southern Philippines, see the [Travel Warning for the Philippines](#).

Terrorist groups, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jema'ah Islamiyah, as well as groups that have broken away from the more mainstream Moro Islamic Liberation Front or Moro National Liberation Front have carried out bombings resulting in deaths, injuries, and property damage. The central and western areas of Mindanao have experienced bombings targeting bus terminals, public buildings, public markets, and local festivals. While those responsible do not appear to have targeted foreigners, travelers should remain vigilant and avoid congregating in public areas; U.S. Government employees must seek special permission for travel to Mindanao or the Sulu Archipelago. When traveling in Mindanao, U.S. official travelers attempt to lower their profile, limit their length of stay, and exercise extreme caution. Some foreigners who reside in or visit western and central Mindanao hire their own private security personnel.

Bombings have also occurred in both government and public facilities in Metro Manila which resulted in a number of deaths and injuries to bystanders.

Kidnap-for-ransom gangs operate in the Philippines and sometimes target foreigners as well as Filipino-Americans. The New People's Army (NPA), a terrorist organization, operates in many rural areas of the Philippines, including in the northern island of Luzon. While it has not targeted foreigners in several years, the NPA could threaten U.S. citizens engaged in business or property management activities and often demands "revolutionary taxes."

U.S. citizens in the Philippines are advised to monitor local news broadcasts and consider the level of preventive security when visiting public places, especially when choosing hotels, restaurants, beaches, entertainment venues, and recreation sites.

For the latest security information, U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department of State's [Bureau of Consular Affairs' web site](#), which contains the current [Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts](#), as well as the [Worldwide Caution](#).

Up-to-date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States and Canada, or by calling a regular toll-line, 1-202-501-4444, from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The Department of State urges U.S. citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas. For general information about appropriate measures travelers can take to protect themselves in an overseas environment, see the Department of State's extensive tips and travel advice on [traveling safely abroad](#).

CRIME: Crime is a significant concern in urban areas of the Philippines. Though U.S. citizens are not typically targeted for kidnapping, kidnappings and violent assaults do occur in Metro Manila and elsewhere. U.S. citizens should remain aware of their surroundings and exercise good judgment. Reports of confidence games, pick pocketing, internet scams, and credit/ATM card fraud are common. U.S. citizens should be wary of unknown individuals who attempt to befriend them, especially just after

arrival in the country. It is best not to accept food, drink, or rides in private vehicles from strangers, even if they appear legitimate.

Taxis are the recommended form of public transportation. However, the following safeguards are important: do not enter a taxi if it has already accepted another passenger and request that the meter be used. If the driver is unwilling to comply with your requests, please wait for another cab. It is also a good idea to make a mental note of the license plate number should there be a problem. When driving in the city, make certain that the doors are locked and the windows rolled up. All other forms of public transportation, such as the light rail system, buses, and "jeepneys" should be avoided for both safety and security reasons.

Visitors should also be vigilant when using credit and debit cards. One common form of credit/ATM card fraud involves the illicit use of an electronic device to retrieve and record information, including the PIN, from the card's magnetic strip. The information is then used to make unauthorized purchases. To limit your vulnerability to this scam, never let your card out of your sight. When using an ATM, be aware of your surroundings. Avoid ATM locations in dimly lit areas. Exercise caution when entering your ATM personal identification number (PIN) code, to prevent observance by others. Avoid ATM's with unusual coverings attached to the card receiver. The Philippine Banking Association has warned the public in press articles of criminals attaching electronic scanners to ATM card receivers, also designed to illicitly retrieve and record information from the credit/debit card's magnetic strip. A continuing problem is the commercial scam or sting that attempts to sell or to seek negotiation of fraudulent U.S. securities. Visitors and residents should be wary when presented with supposed Federal Reserve Notes or U.S. securities for sale or negotiation. For further information, consult the [Federal Reserve System's](#) web site.

In many countries around the world, counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under local law. In addition, bringing them back to the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

INFORMATION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME: If you are the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate (see the top of this sheet or see the [Department of State's list of embassies and consulates](#)).

This includes the loss or theft of a U.S. passport. The embassy/consulate staff can, for example, help you find appropriate medical care, contact family members or friends, and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed. The Philippines has a victim compensation program to provide financial compensation to victims of violent or personal crime and of unjust imprisonment. Information may be obtained from the Philippine Department of Justice at 011-632-523-8481 through 89, local 344.

The local equivalent to the "911" emergency line in the Philippines is 117.

Please see our information on [Victims of Crime](#), including possible victim compensation programs in the United States.

CRIMINAL PENALTIES: While in a foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than those in the United States for similar offenses. Engaging in sexual conduct with children or using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country is a crime, [prosecutable in the United States](#).

Persons violating the Philippines' laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs in the Philippines are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

Marriage in the Philippines: The Philippine Government requires foreigners who wish to marry in the Philippines to obtain from the U.S. Embassy a "Certificate of Legal Capacity to Contract Marriage" before filing an application for a marriage license. Because there is no national register of marriages in the United States, the U.S. Embassy cannot provide such a certification. As a result, the Philippine Government will accept an "Affidavit in Lieu of a Certificate of Legal Capacity to Contract Marriage" in its place. U.S. citizens may execute this affidavit at the U.S. Embassy in Manila Monday-Friday, between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m., except for Philippine or U.S. holidays. The U.S. citizen must present his/her U.S. passport. The fee for the affidavit is \$30.00 or its peso equivalent. Philippine authorities will not accept any substitute document issued in the United States. Before traveling to the Philippines to be married, U.S. military personnel should contact their personnel office regarding Department of Defense joint service regulations.

Execution of the affidavit by a U.S. consular officer is a notarial act, and the consular officer is authorized by U.S. law to refuse to perform the service if the document will be used for a purpose patently unlawful, improper, or inimical to the best interests of the United States (see 22 C.F.R. section 92.9b). Entering into a marriage contract for the principal purpose of facilitating immigration to the United States for an alien is an unlawful act, and the U.S. Code provides penalties for individuals who commit perjury in an affidavit taken by a consular officer. Relationship fraud is a persistent problem in the Philippines. Relationships developed via correspondence, particularly those begun on the Internet, are particularly susceptible to manipulation.

The Marriage Application Process: Once a U.S. citizen has obtained from the U.S. Embassy an "Affidavit in Lieu of a Certificate of Legal Capacity to Contract Marriage," he/she may file an application for a marriage license at the office of the Philippine Civil Registrar in the town or city where one of the parties is a resident. The U.S. citizen applicant must present: (a) the affidavit; (b) divorce decree(s) or death certificate(s), if applicable (required to verify civil status and legal capacity to contract marriage); (c) his/her U.S. passport; and (d) documentation regarding parental consent or advice, if

applicable. (Persons aged 18 to 21 must have written parental consent to marry in the Philippines; those aged 22 to 24 must have received parental advice. Philippine law prohibits marriage for persons under the age of 18.) A judge, a minister, or other person authorized by the Philippine Government can perform the marriage.

Marriage to a U.S. citizen confers neither citizenship nor an automatic eligibility for entry to the United States. A foreign spouse requires an immigrant visa to live in the United States. Questions about filing a petition to bring a foreign spouse to the United States may be directed to the nearest U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service office, to the U.S. Department of State's Visa Office (telephone: (202) 663-1225) or, while in the Philippines, to the U.S. Embassy's Immigrant Visa Unit.

Disaster Preparedness: The Philippines is a volcano-, typhoon-, flood-, and earthquake-prone country. From May to December, typhoons and flash floods often occur. Flooding can cause road delays and cut off bridges. Typhoons in the vicinity of the Philippines can interrupt air and sea links within the country. Updated information on typhoons is available at the [Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services website](#). Volcanic activity is frequent, and the Philippine Government announces alerts periodically for specific volcanoes. Updated information on volcanoes in the Philippines is available from the U.S. Geological Survey. Earthquakes can also occur throughout the country. General information about natural disaster preparedness is available from the Philippines National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) and from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In the event of a weather-related or other emergency where it is impossible to communicate with the Embassy, please look on the local news and on the Embassy's [Facebook](#) site, created for U.S. citizen information and Embassy opening/closing information.

Customs: Philippine customs authorities enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from the Philippines of items such as currency and firearms. The transport of ammunition is illegal, and Philippine officials have arrested U.S. citizens for having even a small number of bullets or ammunition casings or shells in their luggage. It is advisable to contact the Embassy of the Philippines in Washington, DC, or one of the Philippine consulates in the United States (Chicago, Honolulu, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco) for specific information regarding customs requirements. Counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available in the Philippines; transactions involving such products are illegal and bringing them back to the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines.

Please see our [Customs Information](#).

MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION: Adequate medical care is available in major cities in the Philippines, but even the best hospitals may not meet the standards of medical care, sanitation, and facilities provided by hospitals and doctors in the United States. Medical care is limited in rural and more remote areas.

Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to the United States can cost several or even tens of thousands of dollars. Most hospitals will

require a down payment of estimated fees in cash at the time of admission. In some cases, public and private hospitals have withheld lifesaving medicines and treatments for non-payment of bills. Hospitals also frequently refuse to discharge patients or release important medical documents until the bill has been paid in full. A list of doctors and medical facilities in the Philippines is available from the U.S. Embassy in Manila.

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the [CDC website](#). For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the infectious diseases section of the [World Health Organization's \(WHO\) website](#). The WHO website also contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information. The WHO website also contains additional health information for travelers, including [detailed country-specific health information](#).

MEDICAL INSURANCE: The Department of State strongly urges U.S. citizens to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to determine whether the policy applies overseas and whether it covers emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. For more information, please see our [medical insurance overseas](#) page.

TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS: While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning the Philippines is provided for general reference only and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Travel within the Philippine archipelago is possible by boat, plane, bus, or car. Few tourists rent cars to drive, as the road system is crowded and drivers are undisciplined. Driving off the national highways and paved roads is particularly dangerous, especially at night, and should be avoided. There have been nine major inter-island ferryboat accidents in the last two years, eight with significant loss of life. The safety record is such that U.S. Government employees are advised not to take inter-island ferry boat services unless this is the only means of transportation available. U.S. citizens are advised to avoid overcrowded or unsafe transport and to exercise caution in planning travel by inter-island ferryboats or other public conveyances.

For specific information concerning Philippine driver's permits, vehicle inspection, road tax, and mandatory insurance, please contact the Philippine Embassy in Washington, DC, at tel. (202) 467-9300 or one of the Philippine consulates in the United State (Chicago, Honolulu, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco). Please see also related information from the Philippine Department of Tourism and the Philippine Convention and Visitors Corporation.

Please refer to our [Road Safety](#) page for more information.

AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT: The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Government of the Philippines' Civil Aviation Authority as not being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for the oversight of the Philippines' air carrier operations. Further information may be found on the [FAA's safety assessment page](#).

CHILDREN'S ISSUES: Please see our Office of Children's Issues web pages on [intercountry adoption](#) and [international parental child abduction](#).

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